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ABSTRACT

Seven widely-used high school world history textbooks were analyzed to test the proposition that alternative political and economic systems, such as American democracy and Soviet communism, are treated neutrally, as if they are morally equivalent. This proposition has been advanced by leaders in the U.S. Department of Education as a criticism of high school history textbooks. The study reveals that six of the seven textbooks were very critical of political and economic life in the Soviet Union and of Soviet foreign policies. By contrast, five textbooks were much less critical of China, and two textbooks tended to have a rather positive view of Chinese society. The author recommends balanced treatments of different nations and their political/economic systems while recognizing difficulties of overcoming cultural biases in teaching and writing history. Public statements about the "bland neutrality" of history textbook content by leaders of the U.S. Department of Education are criticized, because they seem to discourage critical thinking and encourage one-sided views of truth. (JJP)

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Citizenship Education: U.S. Department of Education Style!

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Is the purpose of education to liberate or imprison the minds of the young? Is it to explore what they think the answer might be or to hand down a predetermined view? In a democratic society where citizens need to respond to new and complex issues, education must provide them with the intellectual tools needed to make responsible decisions.

Recent public statements by leaders of the United States Department of Education clearly indicate an effort is underway to redefine the purposes of American public education. The Department's goal seems to be to discourage critical thinking and to indoctrinate students with a narrow view of truth. For example, consider Education Secretary Bennett's comments (1985, F1 and F8) that "schools should foster a national consensus in support of the Reagan administration's policy in Central America" and that America's schools must teach young people that the United States is "morally superior" to the Soviet Union.

In April, 1986, a report from the U.S. Department of Education's Denver regional office criticized the University of Denver's Center for Teaching International Relations. The report's author, a lawyer for the regional office charged the center as being "capitulationist, anti-capitalistic" and accused the center of "attacking the institutions that are the cornerstones of our society" (1986: Jaschik, p. 13). A press spokesman for Secretary Bennett said the report did not

represent department policy but didn't stop the report from being distributed to people who asked for it. Since the report's issuance, the chairman of the Colorado Senate's Appropriations Committee indicated he wants to cut off state money to the university while it operated the center (Jaschik, p. 20).

Early in 1986, Undersecretary for Education, Gary Bauer (1983), joined the administration's chorus by attacking history textbooks used in schools. Bauer also attacked a bulletin published by the National Council for the Social Studies on the subject of teaching human rights implying that the booklet was soft on communism. Bauer was also troubled by what he saw as the "bland neutrality" of history textbooks. While Bauer emphasized that he was not asking publishers to produce textbooks that "contain indoctrination masquerading as education," he did believe:

> textbooks also should not read as if they were written by neutrals in the struggle between freedom and slavery. We need to do nothing more than tell the truth -- the truth about our attributes and our shortcomings, about our triumphs and about our defeats, about our heroes and about our fools. And we should tell the truth about those who believe and act upon different principles -- about those who see man as a creature of the state, and not as a child of God endowed with inalienable rights. (Bauer, pp. 7-8)

The difficulty here is it possible to have it both ways? If textbook authors are not to be neutral, what does this suggest? Are they to relinquish objectivity and instead present material as a form of nationalistic propaganda?

The basic issue raised by Bauer and Bennett seems to be, should the purpose of the high school and textbooks used in the high school be to indoctrinate students with a singular "truth" as seen by the Department of Education, or present varying sides of controversial events as objectively as possible based on the best evidence available? Even to assume as Bauer asserts that textbooks can be written in a neutral fashion is a naive notion since historians and authors of any textbook are under the influence of nationalism. Noted American historian, Henry Steele Commager (1980, p. 47) maintains that "consciously or unconsciously, all historians are biased: they are creatures of their time, their race, their faith, their class, their country -- creatures or even prisoners." Commager also claims one bias or prejudice "enslaves" historians, the force of nationalism.

The NCSS View The Bennett/Bauer view of the goals of social studies is in direct opposition to the position taken by the National Council for the Social Studies. Throughout the NCSS Social Studies Curriculum Guidelines (1979), the goal of social studies education is to prepare young people to develop "rational proceses" based on "evidence" and the

"rules of logic." Unfortunately this goal has never been achieved in our schools and many of the recent national reports on education have faulted public schools for this very failing.

Morality in History Both Bennett and Bauer seem to desire a "right" version of history and events to be presented in textbooks. This requires a judging by the author as to what is "right" and the inclusion of the "right" facts to make a case for the "right" position. But, if an author deliberately stacks history texts with a certain view, this would seem to greatly weaken the intellectual credibility of the textbook. A major controversy in education goals has always been the conflict between thinking and indoctrination. The Bennett/Bauer approach seems opposed to critical thinking favoring instead indoctrination.

The Bauer Evidence Let us look more closely at the concerns raised by Bauer over history textbooks in his recent address to the Association of American Publishers. Bauer based his conclusions on his review of six textbooks in global or world history, used in high school classes. Unfortunately, the books selected by review by Bauer do not deal only with 20th century history, but are general surveys of world history from prehistoric time to the present. This greatly reduces the space available to the authors of the texts to provide a detailed accounting of any single period of history.

To determine if Bauer was accurate in his charge of authors misleading children about the nature of the Soviet system and related points, seven world history textbooks from the state approved booklist for the state of Virginia were examined. None of these had were published earlier than 1983. One of the seven focused more heavily on modern world history.

The Soviet Union Do world history textbooks include statements critical of the Soviet Union or do they fail to cite the totalitarian aspects of the USSR as Bauer suggests? All seven of the textbooks reviewed pointed out in varying degrees the grim side of the Soviet political and economic system. An example of Bauer's criticism was that the textbooks neglected to include grim examples such as the Ukranian famine of 1932-33. Let us examine this point and see how each of the seven textbooks handled the topic of famine and the reaction of peasants to collective farms.

1. The government (Soviet) moved to crush the opposition. It shipped angry peasants to less fertile areas, where many of them were starved to death. Other peasants were shot or sent to labor camps. (Wallbank, Shrier, Maier, Gutierrez-Smith, 1984, p. 518)

2. Stalin responded with a brutal crackdown on all opposition. Millions of Kulaks were executed or sent to forced-labor camps in Siberia. As a result, farm production fell in the 1930's, and a terrible famine caused widespread starvation. Stalin later admitted that 10 million people died during collectivation. (Beers, 1984, p. 592)

3. Stalin responded by executing thousands of rebellious peasants and sending thousands more to labor camps in Siberia. (Welty, 1985, p. 646)

4. At the beginning of Communist state, the organization of collective farms caused starvation and death for millions. (Leinwand, 1983, p. 551)

5. In the early 1930s there were crop failures. Peasants who deliberately violated Soviet regulations on collective farms were treated harshly and thousands of Kulaks were wiped out. Millions of Russians died of starvation or were killed by the government troops. (Roselle, 1984, p. 527)

6. Hundreds of thousands of the wealthier peasants were executed, imprisoned, or sent into exile when they attempted to withhold their lands from this collective movement. (Mazour, Peoples, Rabb, 1983, p. 599)

7. Thousands of Kulaks and their families were killed or arrested and sent to labor camps in Siberia. By 1929 the Kulaks were completely wiped out as a group. (Farah, Karls, Kortepeter, 1985, p. 599)

Based on the seven accounts, three gave specific attention to the millions dying from famines, and all indicated strong weaknesses with the collective farm movement. Certainly the murder and enslavement of the Kulaks included in six of the seven books does not enhance the communist image. Generally, the Bauer conclusion that the textbook authors are neutral in their presentation of the USSR is difficult to reconcile with the facts. All the books include sections on totalitarian practices in the USSR, some several pages in

length. These sections address secret police tactics, thought control, repression of basic freedoms and economic control.

One concrete example of this repression is the attention devoted in six of the texts to the persecution of dissidents, particularly Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov. Two texts included full page case studies on the dissidents.

Soviet Satellite Countries Another area where the textbooks seem to differ with the Bauer conclusions is their coverage of Soviet control over the satellite countries such as Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Typical of this coverage were these three accounts:

1. Soviet troops invaded Hungary. In the bloody fight that followed, thousands of Hungarians were killed. Many were captured and sent to slave labor camps in Siberia; and thousands escaped to the United States and Canada. The Hungarian fight for freedom was lost. (Leinwand, p. 610)

2. On November 4, Soviet troops and tanks attacked Budapest in force and crushed the Hungarian Freedom Fighters. (Roselle, p. 573)

3. Soviet tanks and troops sped into Hungary to put down the revolt. Thousands, including Nagy, were imprisoned or executed. About 200,000 people fled. The rebels were brave, daring and almost successful, but they were poorly armed and could not withstand the hundreds and thousands of Soviet troops and tanks. (Welty, p. 686)

These three descriptions are neither neutral nor bland concerning the Soviet actions.

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One of the points raised by Bauer had merit concerning the Soviet Union. Two books mentioned that women had (equal rights to vote with men, but failed to point out that) these rights were within the very limited context of so-called Soviet voting rights. The reader had to go back several pages to be reminded of the one party system in the Soviet Union and that voting meant little there. It is quite possible that in these texts, the authors in their enthusiasm to show new rights for women, lost track of the larger setting of Soviet totalitarianism.

Cambodia Another topic cited by Bauer as being forgotten was that of "genocide in Cambodia." This charge is not supported by the analysis of the seven books reviewed. While the term genocide was used in only one book, all seven included the Cambodian deaths, although the numbers varied greatly, ranging from one million to four million. This is an illustrative a typical account of the period:

> The new government, headed by Pol Pot, wanted to rid the country of any non-Khmer influences. All people who might have been influenced by foreigners were ordered killed. Because Pot thought trade was evil, he had the cities destroyed. The people were relocated to rural areas. Pot's government has been described as one of the cruelest violators of human rights in modern history. Estimates of the number of Kampucheans murdered during his rule range as high as four million. (Welty, p. 686)

Grenada and Afghanistan Two recent events were cited by Bauer as being poorly covered. This is not difficult to understand, particularly for Grenada, which was only mentioned in one of the seven books at all. Textbooks take several years to write and publish and last minute events are too often tacked on in a superficial way. To make a judgment on a text based on their coverage of either Grenada or Afghanistan is unwise and unfair. Five years from now, these events become fair game for analysis. For books with a 1983 to 1985 publication date, such judgment should not be given much credence.

Do world history textbooks give the wrong version of the Afghan invasion as cited by Bauer or do they merely give so little information that not much of anything can be concluded? Here are several versions:

1. The Soviet Union invaded Iran's neighbor, Afghanistan to boost the shaky communist government there. (Mazour et al., p. 772)

2. In December, 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan to bring the country under their control. (Wallbank et al., p. 752)

3. While all of these incidents caused tension between the superpowers, détente prevailed. In 1979, however, the situation changed. The year before, a Soviet-backed military coup had overthrown the government of Afghanistan. The Afghanis, led by Muslim fighters known as Mujahidin, organized armed resistance against the new regime. The Soviet Union, afraid that the uprising of Muslims in Afghanistan might spread and threaten its security, stepped in. In August 1979, Soviet troops invaded

> Afghanistan and set up a new government. In the spring of 1984, the fighting was still going on. (Farah et al., p. 741)

Version two is the one Bauer found to be correct but he would probably dislike one and two as being too defensive. The reader can conclude which account is the best. As always, the eye of the beholder makes such choices difficult.

China A final topic of history was also found by Bauer to be neutrally presented, the rule of the Communist Chinese from 1949 to the present. For two of the seven texts, Bauer's point is well made. Nowhere could any statements describing the totalitarian aspects of Chinese life be found. In fact, the life there sounded quite good, progressive and virtually unflawed. On the other side, five texts did include the totalitarian tactics used in the communist takeover of China and afterward. Still, the description of the harsh communist rule in the Soviet Union was a marked contrast to the life portrayed in two of the texts concerning China. Even the most critical of the seven were mild in their comments about the Chinese compared with the USSR. Why this discrepancy of treatment of the two nations is puzzling. Perhaps the authors have a subconscious liking for China, that does not exist for the Soviet Union.

Conclusion Based on an analysis of seven world history textbooks, the general thesis of Bauer that the books are

neutral in their treatment of the Soviet Union is difficult to accept. In fact, six texts are very critical of the Soviet Union. For the coverage of China, Bauer is more accurate, but even here the picture is mixed.

Returning to the original desire of Bauer that textbooks should not be written in an objective way, the only other choice seems to be to have textbooks written by authors with deliberate prejudice. Surely the United States is strong enough as a nation in all aspects of political, social, and economic life to measure up very well against the Soviet Union without having textbook authors stacking the deck in our favor. Historians have a difficult enough time already to escape their national bias. They do not need a state dictated view as apparently desired by the U.S. Department of Education.

Fred Hechinger in the New York Times based on the actions described in this paper asks whether the task of the Federal Department of Education is "primarily to administer programs enacted and funded by Congress? Or should it seek to influence what schools and colleges teach?" (April, 1986). Since the Reagan administration apparently sees the Department as a vehicle to impose its ideologies in the schools, and since these views are in opposition to the goals desired by leading social studies educators throughout the United States, it is important that social studies educators

communicate their concern in all ways possible to the public as well as the education profession.

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